

Birding Rwanda—in search of Red-collared Babbler *Kupeornis rufocinctus*, Albertine Rift endemics and more

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Observer les oiseaux au Rwanda—à la recherche du Phyllanthe à collier roux *Kupeornis rufocinctus* et les espèces endémiques du Rift albertin. Cet article présente deux des meilleurs sites pour observer les oiseaux au Rwanda : la forêt de Nyungwe (où l'on peut trouver 25 des 35 espèces endémiques du Rift albertin) et le Parc National de l'Akagera (où 525 espèces d'oiseaux ont été recensées, dont le Bec-en-sabot du Nil *Balaeniceps rex* et plusieurs espèces confinées au bassin du Lac Victoria).

The tiny country of Rwanda is perched on Central Africa's Albertine Rift highlands, straddling the watershed between the continent's two great rivers, the Nile and the Congo. It has been largely overlooked by birders, who instead are lured by the well-publicised bird diversity and tourist facilities boasted by its northern neighbour, Uganda. However, one of Africa's most charismatic and enigmatic birds, the **Red-collared Babbler** *Kupeornis rufocinctus*, is only accessible in Rwanda, as is **Albertine Owlet** *Glaucidium albertinum*, and other species such as **Red-faced Barbet** *Lybius rubrifacies*, '**Ruaha**' **Chat** *Myrmecocichla (arnotti) collaris*, **Grauer's Swamp Warbler** *Bradypterus graueri*, **Kungwe Apalis** *Apalis (rufogularis) argentea* and **Purple-breasted Sunbird** *Nectarinia purpureiventris* are perhaps most accessibly found here.

This article focuses on the two top strategic birding areas, which are the largest remaining blocks of natural habitat in this densely cultivated country. Nyungwe National Park is the undoubted jewel in the crown and is covered in most detail here. One of the largest montane forests in Africa, it has more Albertine Rift endemic birds than any other site outside Congo-Kinshasa (see Table 1), and is easily accessed by an excellent tarmac road. On the other side of the country, Akagera National Park offers a broad diversity of savannah and wetland birds, including **Shoebill** *Balaeniceps rex* and several species confined to the Lake Victoria basin.

Focusing on these areas, it is quite possible to record over 300 species in just ten days in Rwanda, less than half the country's total list of almost 700 species. Most tourists visit during the main dry season in June–September, although the shorter December–January dry season may also prove to be a rewarding time to visit. With the

1994 genocide now firmly in the past, Rwanda is one of the most organised countries in Africa and is proactively rebuilding its infrastructure and promoting tourism. A bird atlas project has also recently been initiated.

Albertine Rift Endemics

The forests of the western or Albertine Rift support more endemic birds than any other Endemic Bird Area in Africa. Adding to their allure, some of Africa's most enigmatic birds occur here: **Congo Bay Owl** *Phodilus prigoginei*, **Prigogine's Nightjar** *Caprimulgus prigoginei* and **Schouteden's Swift** *Schoutedenapus schoutedeni* are cumulatively known from fewer than ten specimens! Extending patchily through eastern Congo-Kinshasa, western Tanzania, Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, the Albertine Rift forests support at least 35 strict endemics. Many of these forests are under threat, especially due to clearance for agriculture, and the status of those forests in Congo-Kinshasa, which support the greatest diversity of endemics, is poorly known. In recent years, most birders 'chasing' the Albertine Rift specialties have visited Uganda's Bwindi region, but this offers only a subset of the region's endemics. Rwanda's Nyungwe National Park offers a greater diversity in a magnificent setting.

Nyungwe National Park

Nyungwe is one of Africa's best forests for birding: an excellent road runs through the national park offering excellent vistas and chances for 25 of the 35 strict Albertine Rift endemics (see Table 1). Nyungwe harbours all of the Albertine Rift endemics recorded from Bwindi in Uganda with the exception of **African Green**

Table 1. Endemic birds of the Albertine Rift. Taxa not recognised specifically by the African Bird Club checklist are denoted by their subspecies epithets. Chapin's Flycatcher is listed here but is not a strict Albertine Rift endemic as it also occurs at one site in Kenya. Ruwenzori Nightjar *Caprimulgus ruwenzorii* is not listed as it is now recognised to occur widely outside this region. Species occurring in more than three forests in Congo-Kinshasa are coded simply DRC.

Tableau 1. Oiseaux endémiques du Rift albertin. Les taxons qui ne sont pas reconnus comme espèces sur la liste de l'African Bird Club sont indiqués par le nom de la sous-espèce en question. Le Gobemouche de Chapin *Muscicapa lendu* est listé ici, bien qu'il ne soit pas endémique au Rift albertin, puisqu'il se trouve également sur un site au Kenya. L'Engoulevent du Ruwenzori *Caprimulgus ruwenzorii* n'est pas mentionné, car l'on sait maintenant qu'il est largement distribué en dehors de la région. Les espèces qui se trouvent dans plus de trois forêts au Congo-Kinshasa sont indiquées simplement par DRC.

Handsome Francolin <i>Francolinus nobilis</i>	Nyungwe
Ruwenzori Turaco <i>Ruwenzorornis johnstoni</i>	Nyungwe
Congo Bay Owl <i>Phodilus prigoginei</i>	Itombwe, DRC
Albertine Owlet <i>Glaucidium albertinum</i>	Nyungwe
Prigogine's Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus prigoginei</i>	Itombwe, DRC
Dwarf Honeyguide <i>Indicator pumilio</i>	Nyungwe
African Green Broadbill <i>Pseudocalyptomena graueri</i>	Kivu & Itombwe, DRC; Bwindi, Uganda
Grauer's Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina graueri</i>	DRC
Prigogine's Greenbul <i>Chlorocichla prigoginei</i>	Lendu Plateau, DRC
Archer's Robin Chat <i>Cossypha archeri</i>	Nyungwe
Red-throated Alethe <i>Alethe poliophrys</i>	Nyungwe
Kivu Ground Thrush <i>Zoothera (piaggiae) tanganjicae</i>	Nyungwe
Neumann's Warbler <i>Hemitesia neumanni</i>	Nyungwe
Grauer's Swamp Warbler <i>Bradypterus graueri</i>	Nyungwe
Grauer's Warbler <i>Graueria vittata</i>	Nyungwe
Chapin's Crombec <i>Sylvietta (leucophyrus) chapini</i>	Lendu Plateau, DRC
Red-faced Woodland Warbler <i>Phylloscopus laetus</i>	Nyungwe
Ruwenzori Apalis <i>Apalis ruwenzorii</i>	Nyungwe
Mountain Masked Apalis <i>Apalis personata</i>	Nyungwe
Kabobo Apalis <i>Apalis (porphyrolaema) kaboboensis</i>	Mount Kabobo, DRC
Kungwe Apalis <i>Apalis (rufogularis) argentea</i>	Nyungwe
Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher <i>Melaenornis ardesiacus</i>	Nyungwe
Chapin's Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa lendu</i>	DRC, Bwindi Uganda and Kakamega Kenya; unconfirmed for Nyungwe
Ruwenzori Batis <i>Batis diops</i>	Nyungwe
Red-collared Babbler <i>Kupeornis rufocinctus</i>	Nyungwe
Chapin's Babbler <i>Kupeornis chapini</i>	DRC
Stripe-breasted Tit <i>Parus fasciiventris</i>	Nyungwe
Blue-headed Sunbird <i>Cyanomitra alinae</i>	Nyungwe
Purple-breasted Sunbird <i>Nectarinia purpureiventris</i>	Nyungwe
Ruwenzori Double-collared Sunbird <i>Cinnyris stuhlmanni</i>	Nyungwe
Regal Sunbird <i>Cinnyris regius</i>	Nyungwe
Rockefeller's Sunbird <i>Cinnyris rockefelleri</i>	DRC; unconfirmed for Nyungwe
Yellow-crested Helmetshrike <i>Prionops alberti</i>	DRC
Strange Weaver <i>Ploceus alienus</i>	Nyungwe
Dusky Crimsonwing <i>Cryptospiza jacksoni</i>	Nyungwe
Shelley's Crimsonwing <i>Cryptospiza shelleyi</i>	Nyungwe

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Figure 1. Ruwenzori Turaco *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni* (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com). This Albertine Rift endemic is easily seen at Nyungwe.

Touraco du Ruwenzori *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni* (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com). Cet endémique du Rift albertin est facile à voir à Nyungwe.

Figure 2. Nyungwe forest is the best place to see Purple-breasted Sunbird *Nectarinia purpureiventris* (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

La forêt de Nyungwe est le meilleur site pour observer le Souimanga à ventre pourpre *Nectarinia purpureiventris* (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 3. Neumann's Warbler *Hemitesia neumanni* lurks in Nyungwe's dark understorey (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Crombec de Neumann *Hemitesia neumanni* fréquente le sous-bois de Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 4. Grauer's Swamp Warbler *Bradypterus graueri*, Kamiranzovu swamp, Nyungwe National Park (Peter Ryan)

Bouscarle de Grauer *Bradypterus graueri*, marais de Kamiranzovu, Parc National de Nyungwe (Peter Ryan)

Figure 5. Rwanda is the best place to observe the social Red-collared Babbler *Kupeornis rufocinctus* (Ray Tipper)

Le Rwanda est le meilleur endroit pour observer le Phyllanthé à collier roux *Kupeornis rufocinctus* (Ray Tipper)

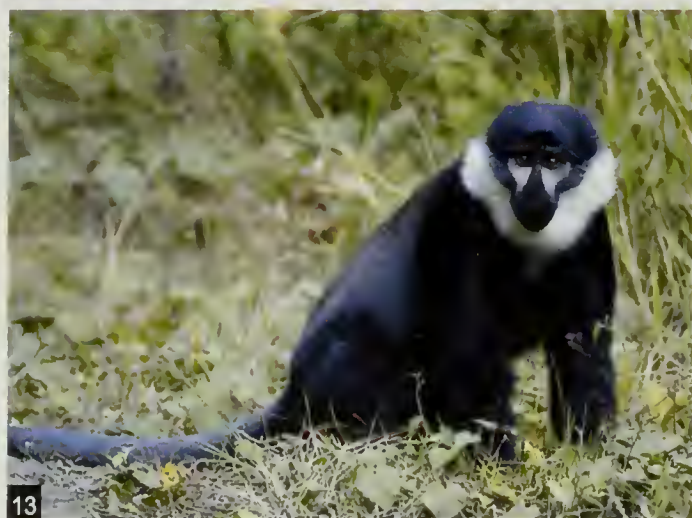
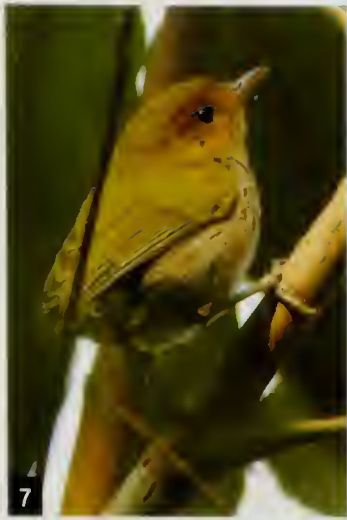
Figure 6. Ruwenzori Apalis *Apalis ruwenzorii* inhabits tangles on Nyungwe's forest edge (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

L'Apalis du Ruwenzori *Apalis ruwenzorii* occupe les feuillages denses des lisières de la forêt de Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri* (and given the broadbill's unobtrusive nature, it may well occur, as large parts of Nyungwe seem superficially similar to Ruhiza in Bwindi where the broadbill occurs). When birding in Nyungwe one has a sense of exploration; that anything could appear over the next hill. For example, the rare **Owl-faced Monkey** *Cercopithecus hamlyni* was only discovered in Nyungwe in 1989. **Chapin's Flycatcher** *Muscicapa lendu* and **Rockefeller's Sunbird** *Cinnyris rockefelleri* have been claimed from Nyungwe, but their occurrence requires confirmation, and the secretive **Congo Bay Owl** *Phodilus prigoginei* may also occur.

Target birds.—25 Albertine Rift endemics including **Albertine Owlet**, **Neumann's Warbler**





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Figure 7. Red-faced Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus laetus* forms part of canopy bird parties at Nyungwe National Park (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Pouillot à face rousse *Phylloscopus laetus* fait partie des rondes insectivores de la canopée dans le Parc National de Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 8. Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater *Merops oreobates* occurs on the edge of highland forest clearings (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Guêpier montagnard *Merops oreobates* se trouve à la lisière des clairières à haute altitude (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 9. The almost mythical Albertine Owlet *Glaucidium albertinum* has been mist-netted in this patch of mossy forest near Kamiranzovu swamp, Nyungwe National Park (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

La Chevêchette du Graben *Glaucidium albertinum* a été capturée au filet japonais dans ce lambeau de forêt près du marais de Kamiranzovu, Parc National de Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 10. Northern Double-collared Sunbird *Cinnyris reichenowi* is common and widespread in Nyungwe National Park (Peter Ryan)

Le Souimanga de Preuss *Cinnyris reichenowi* est commun et répandu dans le Parc National de Nyungwe (Peter Ryan)

Figure 11. Lühder's Bushshrike *Laniarius luehderi* skulks in tangles at mid and lower elevations (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Gonolek de Lühder *Laniarius luehderi* fréquente la végétation dense à moyenne et basse altitude (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 12. Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri* occurs in the extensive papyrus swamps of Akagera National Park (David Winter)

Le Gonolek des papyrus *Laniarius mufumbiri* se rencontre dans les papyrus du Parc National de l'Akagera (David Winter)

Figure 13. L'Hoest's Monkey *Cercopithecus lhoesti* can be seen on the roadside in Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Cécopithèque de l'Hoest *Cercopithecus lhoesti* peut être observé le long de la route qui traverse Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Figure 14. Ruwenzori Batis *Batis diops* favours the lower and mid levels in the forest of Nyungwe National Park (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Le Pririt du Ruwenzori *Batis diops* fréquente les strates basses et moyennes de la forêt de Nyungwe (Callan Cohen / www.birdingafrica.com)

Hemitesia neumanni, **Grauer's Swamp Warbler**, **Red-collared Babbler** and **Purple-breasted Sunbird**.

Habitats.—Nyungwe encompasses almost 1,000 km² of montane forest and heaths at 1,600–2,950 m elevation.

Getting there.—Situated in the south-west of the country on the border with Burundi, the park takes about 3–4 hours to reach on mostly good tar roads from Kigali.

Top birding areas. (1) *Roadside birding.*—The main road between Butare and Cyangugu runs through the park for 55 km and the undulating terrain boasts spectacular scenery, with unbroken forest stretching into the hazy distance. It also facilitates birding, with opportunities to observe canopy species at eye-level on the steeper slopes. Soaring raptors to look for include **African Cuckoo Hawk** *Aviceda cuculoides*, **African Harrier Hawk** *Polyboroides typus*, **African Goshawk** *Accipiter tachiro*, **Mountain Buzzard** *Buteo oreophilus*, **Cassin's Spizaetus africanus** and **Ayres's Hawk Eagles** *Hieraaetus ayresii* and **Crowned Eagle** *Stephanoaetus coronatus*.

A host of the commoner Albertine Rift endemics can be found in the roadside tangles at the forest edge including **Ruwenzori Apalis** *Apalis ruwenzorii* and **Mountain Masked Apalises** *A. personata*, **Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher** *Melaenornis ardesiacus*, **Ruwenzori Batis** *Batis diops*, and **Blue-headed Cyanomitra** *alinea* and **Regal Sunbirds** *Cinnyris regius*. One of the more interesting endemics is **Grauer's Warbler** *Graueria vittata*, the sole member of its genus. This rather secretive, dull grey bird of dense tangles and creepers is best located by its soft trilling call, which is remarkably similar to that of a **Scaly-throated Honeyguide** *Indicator variegatus*. The sweet warbles of **African Hill Babbler** *Pseudoalcippe abyssinica* emanate from these tangles too. **Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria*, **Olive Thrush** *Turdus olivaceus*, **Collared Sunbird** *Hedydipna collaris* and **African Yellow White-eye** *Zosterops senegalensis* are common.

Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata* is commonly seen from the road and the forest rings to the raucous calls of **Black-billed Turaco** *Tauraco schuettii*. Nyungwe must be one of the best places to see the bizarre **Ruwenzori Turaco** *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni*, which possesses an atypical, squirrel-like call and is placed in its

own genus. Also in the treetops are **Waller's Onychognathus walleri**, **Slender-billed O. tenuirostris**, **Stuhlmann's Poeoptera stuhlmanni** and **Sharpe's Starlings Pholia sharpii**. Scan from the valley viewpoints for these species, as well as for **African Olive Pigeon Columba arquatrix** and **Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill Bycanistes subcylindricus**, whilst the calls of **Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo Cercococcyx montanus** and **Yellow-rumped Pogoniulus bilineatus** and **Western Green Tinkerbirds P. coryphaeus** ring out below.

Nyungwe is rich in bushshrikes, with **Doherty's Bushshrike Telophorus dohertyi** and **Mountain Sooty Boubou Laniarius poensis** common in tangles throughout, and **Lühder's Bushshrike Laniarius luehderi** at lower elevations. Higher in the tangles, watch out for the buff-breasted morph of **Many-coloured Bushshrike Telophorus multicolor**, which is confined to the southern Albertine Rift, and **Yellowbill Ceuthmochares aereus**. Look out too in these higher tangles and the canopy for **Chestnut-throated Apalis porphyrolaema**, **Grey A. cinerea** and **Black-throated Apalises A. jacksoni**.

Chubb's Cisticola Cisticola chubbi, **Yellowbellied Estrilda quartinia** and **Black-headed Waxbills E. atricapilla** and **Streaky Seedeater Serinus striolatus** are common in disturbed open areas along the roadsides, where **Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater Merops oreobates**, **White-eyed Slaty Melaenornis fischeri** and **African Dusky Flycatchers Muscicapa adusta** can be seen hawking and **Black Saw-wing Psalidoprocne pristoptera** is common. Most of the understorey 'skulkers' are most easily seen along the trails described later, but it might be worth noting that we have observed **Grey-winged Robin Chat Cossypha polioptera** along the main road at 02°48.672"S 29°13.373"E.

After dark, **Ruwenzori Nightjar Caprimulgus ruwenzorii** can be seen along the road, while **African Wood Owl Strix woodfordii** and, with some luck, **Fraser's Eagle Owl Bubo poensis** can be heard.

(2) *Uwinka* (02°47.867"S 29°20.066"E; parking lot adjacent to the headquarters).—There is a wonderful network of trails through the forest, centred on the park headquarters at Uwinka. Canopy birding will be further enhanced with the construction of a canopy walkway at Uwinka due

to be completed in late 2010, and plans are afoot to erect canopy towers at other strategic sites. The short walk from the parking to the reception can be a good area to spot commoner Albertine Rift endemics, including **Red-faced Woodland Warbler Phylloscopus laetus** and **Ruwenzori Batis**, and look out for **Handsome Francolin Francolinus nobilis** on the edges of the road at dawn and dusk (the francolin occurs widely throughout the forest but is more easily heard than seen). **Red-collared Babbler** actually occurs quite widely in Nyungwe and has been seen along the forest trails here too, but is more reliable on the Bigugu Trail (see below).

(3) *Bigugu trail* (02°47.362"S 29°23.964"E; start of the trail at the road).—The trail that leads to Mount Bigugu, the highest point in Nyungwe, is one of the best sites in the world for **Red-collared Babbler**. Nyungwe is the only forest outside Congo-Kinshasa where this gorgeous species occurs, and like **White-throated Mountain Babbler Kupeornis gilberti** of southwest Cameroon, it roves through the forest in small family groups, gleaning insects among epiphytes on large branches. Parties maintain contact with soft churrs, which can become a harsh babbler-like cacophony in excitement. The babblers are often associated with canopy flocks also comprising **Narina's Apaloderma narina** and **Bar-tailed Trogons A. vittatum**, **White-headed Woodhoopoe Phoeniculus bollei**, **Tullberg's Woodpecker Campethera tullbergi**, **Grey Cuckooshrike Coracina caesia**, **Eastern Mountain Greenbul Andropadus nigriceps**, **Yellow-streaked Greenbul Phyllastrephus flavostriatus**, **Chinspot Batis Batis molitor** (a canopy species in Nyungwe), **Stripe-breasted Tit Parus fasciiventis**, **Lagden's Bushshrike Malaconotus lagdeni** and **Montane Oriole Oriolus percivali**. Denser tangles shelter **Yellow-whiskered Greenbul Andropadus latirostris**, **White-browed Crombec Sylvietta leucophrys** and **Grauer's Warbler**.

Some of the most exciting species occur in the understorey: listen out for **White-starred Robin Pogonocichla stellata**, **Equatorial Akalat Sheppardia aequatorialis**, **Archer's Robin Chat Cossypha archeri** (with its distinctive, tremulous call), **Red-throated Alethe** (the latter especially at ant swarms) and **Mountain Illadopsis Illadopsis pyrrhoptera**. **Dusky Crimsonwing Cryptospiza jacksoni** may flush from the forest path at the edges

Primates of Nyungwe

Nyungwe is also well known for its primates with 11 diurnal species present. **Chimpanzee** *Pan troglodytes* occurs throughout and can be searched for here or at the nearby lower altitude Cyamudongo Forest. The Uwinka area is famous for its large troop of some 400 **Angola Pied Colobus** *Colobus angolensis rwenzori*. Nyungwe must be one of the best places to see **l'Hoest's Monkey** *Cercopithecus lhoesti*, which is often present along roadsides. Also watch for **Grey-cheeked Mangabey** *Cercocebus albigena johnstoni*, **Blue Monkey** *Cercopithecus mitis doggetti*, **Mona Monkey** *C. mona*, **Red-tailed Monkey** *C. ascanius schmidtii*, **Vervet Monkey** *C. (aethiops) pygerythrus* and **Olive Baboon** *Papio anubis*. **Golden Monkey** *Cercopithecus mitis kandti* and **Owl-faced Monkey** *C. hamlyni* are shy and little-known residents, mainly found in the bamboo zone and seldom seen. Note that Eastern Gorilla *Gorilla beringei* no longer occurs here and is best searched for at Volcanoes National Park, which also hosts a selection of Albertine Rift endemics and lies on the northern border adjacent to Mgahinga National Park in Uganda.

of clearings anywhere, but more luck is required to find its much more elusive relative, **Shelley's Crimsonwing** *C. shelleyi*. Dense scrub at the edge of clearings is inhabited by the vocal **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler** *Bradypterus cinnamomeus*, **Mountain Yellow Warbler** *Chloropeta similis* and **Banded Prinia** *Prinia bairdii*.

(4) *Kamiranzovu Marsh* (02°48.897'S 29°16.011'E; start of the trail, and 02°48.582'S 29°15.271'E; main marsh).—A trail leads down to this spectacular marsh, which extends over 13 km² in a valley bottom and supports a large population of the localised and threatened **Grauer's Swamp Warbler**. This rare warbler is easily seen here, drawing the attention by virtue of its low whirring display-flight. The picturesque forest surrounding the marsh literally drips with epiphytes and there have been several sightings of the almost mythical **Albertine Owlet** here. Listen too for **Red-chested Owlet** *Glaucidium tephronotum*, which is widespread at Nyungwe and often attracts mobbing groups of small birds. Some of Africa's most desired understorey

'skulkers' occur here too: listen out for **Kivu Ground Thrush** *Zoothera (piaggiae) tanganjicae*, the unique short-tailed **Neumann's Warbler** and **Grey-chested Illadopsis** *Kakamega poliothorax*. **Strange Weaver** *Ploceus alienus* occurs in the tangles here (and elsewhere in the forest), noisily investigating clusters of leaves.

(5) *Karamba area* (02°47.882'S 29°11.168'E; start of trail).—This level trail leads through quite open forest and forest edge and has many of the roadside species mentioned earlier, although it is worth checking canopy flocks for **Kungwe Apalis** especially, and **White-bellied Robin Chat** *Cossyphicula roberti* can be found in the first patch of forest. The incredibly iridescent **Purple-breasted Sunbird** breeds at the forest edge here. Open areas are worth checking for **Scarce Swift** *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* and musing about the possibility of the very similar **Schouteden's Swift** *S. schoutedeni*.

(6) *Rangiro Road* (02°47.672'S 29°20.590'E; start of the road, 02°47.577'S 29°20.732'E; huge *Symphonia* tree, and 02°47.672'S 29°20.590'E; start of lower altitude forest).—Much of the lower elevation forest has been replaced by tea plantations, but some remains below Uwinka and a rough but driveable road leads through these remnants. Near the start of the descent, a huge *Symphonia* tree (flowers reliably in July) attracts many sunbirds including regular **Purple-breasted Sunbird**. **Dwarf Honeyguide** *Indicator pumilio* has been recorded here too. In the lower forest patch, there is less of a montane 'feel' to the birding, and species include **Elliott's Woodpecker** *Dendropicos elliotii*, **Shelley's Greenbul** *Andropadus masukuensis*, **Dusky Tit** *Parus funereus*, **White-breasted Negrofinch** *Nigrita fusconotus* and **Yellow-breasted Hyliota** in the forest canopy. The shy **Shelley's Crimsonwing** has been seen here, but can be found anywhere in the park.

(7) *Uwasenkoko Marsh* (02°52.857'S 29°35.297'E).—This small, high-altitude marsh spans the main road and is certainly the most accessible place to see **Grauer's Swamp Warbler**. **Red-chested Flufftail** *Sarothrura rufa* can be heard 'hooting' from the dense grass. In the surrounding shrublands, **Brown Woodland Warbler** *Phylloscopus umbrovirens* and **Ruwenzori Double-collared Sunbird** occur. Don't be misled by the smaller **Northern Double-collared**

Sunbird *Cinnyris reichenowi*, which occurs throughout much of the park and is especially common around the guesthouse at Gisakura.

Recommended guides include.—Claver Ntoyinka.

Recommended accommodation.—More accommodation is planned, but for now there are two guesthouses at Gisakura (one on a private tea estate) and it is also possible to stay in one of the many hotels in Cyanguu, on the shores of Lake Kivu, and commute just over an hour to the forest. Camping is possible at Uwinka.

Akagera National Park

With some 525 species, Akagera formerly boasted one of the largest bird lists of any protected area in Africa. However, more than half the park was degazetted in 1997 to accommodate returning refugees, a pattern that is likely to be repeated more widely across Africa as other countries inevitably begin to experience the same phenomenal population densities and land pressures operating in Rwanda. However, the remaining area of park is still close to 1,100 km² and offers great birding. Widespread savannah and wetland birds dominate the area's avifauna, but there are a few more localised species, making the park a great compliment to the montane forest birding of Nyungwe.

Top birds.—**Shoebill**, **Ring-necked Francolin** *Francolinus streptophorus*, **Red-faced Barbet**, **'Ruaha' Chat**, **White-winged Swamp Warbler** *Bradypterus carpalis*, **Miombo Wren Warbler** *Calamonastes undosus*, **Tabora Cisticola** *Cisticola angusticauda*, **Papyrus Gonolek** *Laniarius mufumbiri*.

Habitats.—A diversity of lowland habitats, ranging from vast swamps and lakes on the Akagera floodplain, through riparian thickets, dry forest and woodland, to grassy plains and rocky hills.

Getting there.—Situated on Rwanda's eastern border with Tanzania, Akagera is a three-hour drive from Kigali (mostly on tarmac roads). Given the relatively rough tracks through much of the reserve, it requires several days to explore the more remote northern parts of the park.

Top birding areas. (1) *Final section of dirt road before the park* (01°97.869"S 30°58.030"E; **'Ruaha' Chat**, and 01°96.255"S 30°58.981"E; river crossing).—Once you leave the tarmac road,

numerous widespread savannah birds can be found in the degraded woodland and agricultural areas. Probably most interesting is the so-called **'Ruaha' Chat**, the local taxon of **White-headed Black Chat** *Myrmecocichla arnotti*, which Glen *et al.* (in press) argue should be afforded species status due to its genetic distinctness and the diagnostic white cheeks and collar in the female. Unlike White-headed Black Chat, which prefers natural miombo, this chat is common around small villages and breeds in the roofs of houses. Entering the more pristine grassy broadleaf woodlands of the park, it is replaced by **Sooty Chat** *M. nigra*. **White-collared Oliveback** *Nesocharis ansorgei* has been recorded at a river crossing and **Miombo Wren Warbler** in denser bush at the park entrance.

(2) *Slopes below Akagera Lodge* (01°87.922"S 30°70.960"E).—Akagera Lodge is sited atop a rocky ridge overlooking Lake Ihema and its grounds teem with many woodland birds. **Red-faced Barbet** can be seen in fruiting trees here, and should also be searched for in the grassy woodlands below the lodge. Rocky ridges support small numbers of the scarce and reclusive **Ring-necked Francolin**, which is best separated from the more widespread **Shelley's Francolinus shelleyi**, **Red-winged** *F. levaillantii* and **Coqui Francolins** *F. coqui*, and **Red-necked Spurfowl** *F. afer* by its peculiar call. **Tabora Cisticola**, **Souza's Shrike** *Lanius souzae* and **Orange-winged Pytilia** *Pytilia afra* have been recorded in these woodlands too.

(3) *Lake Ihema* (01°88.228"S 30°73.823"E).—The shores of this vast lake support a huge diversity of birds, not only in the grassy edges but also the taller forest flanking the shores.

(4) *Papyrus swamp* (01°82.885"S 30°74.336"E).—This is an excellent spot for **White-winged Swamp Warbler**, **Carruther's Cisticola** *Cisticola carruthersi* and **Papyrus Gonolek**, all which skulk in the large papyrus swamps here (be mindful of **African Buffalo** *Syncerus caffer*). **Papyrus Canary** *Serinus koliensis* also occurs, but the curiously localised **Papyrus Yellow Warbler** *Chloropeta gracilirostris* is surprisingly absent from the park list. It is, however, found at other wetlands in Rwanda, including Rugezi Marsh in the north and at least two marshes south of Kigali.

(5) *Shoebill scanning point at Lake Birengero* (01°81.507"S 30°74.230"E).—The park has a small resident population of **Shoebills**, but access

to their swamps is restricted to a few vantage points, and it is a matter of luck whether any are visible. We recommend scanning the far edges of the lake at this point. The area is apparently very difficult to reach by boat because the lake is too shallow.

Recommended guides include.—James Muhizi.

Recommended accommodation.—Options are limited, but Akagera Lodge offers upmarket and very well-sited accommodation.

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Red-collared Babbler © Ray Pomeroy

